

Community Round Table on Nurturing Spiritual Growth

First-St. Andrew's United Church
London, Ontario

held on

Wednesday, April 4th, 2018

Summary Report

Introduction

First-St. Andrew's United Church (FSA) is engaged in a multi-year process to define its future as a faith community from three major perspectives: faith, service and the arts. This is grounded in the acceptance that we need to change in order to adapt to the changing environment in which we are a part – recognizing the impact the changes taking place around us are having on our faith community.

Using an engagement methodology developed by the EDGE team of the United Church, a series of community round tables are being hosted by FSA to learn, listen and inform our decision-making as we move forward.

On a very blustery Wednesday, April 4th, 2018 the Planning Committee of FSA welcomed representatives from 12 different United Church congregations in Middlesex Presbytery to a Community Round Table focusing on nurturing spiritual growth. Approximately 25 people participated. In keeping with the round table approach, most of the time was spent in small discussion groups and two topics were addressed: what is happening to nurture spiritual growth; and, from a community (of churches) perspective, how can we foster collaboration.

This is a brief summary of the session.

- All 22 pastoral charges in Middlesex Presbytery of the United Church were invited to participate. Ministers and lay leaders from London Conference and ten pastoral charges¹ attended the round table.
- Steve Elson, Chair of the FSA Planning Committee welcomed everyone; Rev. Michelle Down outlined the focus and purpose of the Round table; and Joyce Payne outlined the pending changes to the governance of the United Church of Canada.
- Rev. Dr. Anne Beattie Stokes provided spiritual inspiration for working together to nurture and strengthen Ministry.

¹ Avon-Putnam Pastoral Charge, Calvary, Colborne Street, Dorchester, Fairmont, First-St. Andrew's, Ilderton-Birr Pastoral Charge, Ivan Pastoral Charge, London Conference, Roundtree Memorial, White Oaks

What is happening to nurture spiritual growth?

- A number of traditional, alternative and new programs are taking place that nurture communal spiritual growth by congregations (e.g. prayer groups, bible study, film/book club, yoga groups, First Nations reconciliation events, jazz vespers, worship)
- Similarly, individuals are participating in a variety of activities to nurture and enrich their own spiritual growth and awareness (e.g. personal quiet time and reflection, nature walks, retreats, readings, Bible study)
- On a larger scale the United Church's EDGE program and Embracing the Spirit are challenging United Churches across Canada to redefine their roles based on purposeful reflection and action.
- Participants also noted the upcoming Centre for Practical Theology event called reVITALize Practical Theology Now! coming to Metropolitan United Church on April 27-28, 2018.
- Participation in United Church camp programs

What is missing? Issues and Concerns

- Connection and collaboration across congregations
- Isolation of clergy is a real issue, lack opportunities to provide mutual support, collaborate
- Competition among churches for attention and members

What can we do that is practical and action-oriented?

- Share information about what each other is doing – e.g., summer camp programs, collect and post to a common web site – assign one person in each congregation to be the point person for this (communication curator)
- Share music catalogues so music does not have to be bought on an individual basis (prevents duplication) – same applies to other resources such as curriculum. (*Note: copy write laws may not permit sharing music.*)
- Share training programs for lay pastoral care leadership
- Plan and hold an engagement session targeted on millennials and their spiritual interests and needs
- Plan and implement opportunities to share clergy for worship, pastoral care and other staff resources, sharing space
- Plan and implement joint services, joint programs for common target groups

- Identify and foster areas of special interest, expertise on the part of each congregation – to foster collaboration rather than competition
- One size does not fit all – offer different options, approaches to faith development
- Use mandate for First Nations reconciliation of the UCC to plan and undertake collaborative initiatives in partnership with First Nations

What is needed to make any of this happen?

- Development of trusting relationships among participating leaders, congregations – work with people you get to know and trust
- A commitment to on-going collaboration and partnership building
- Identification of shared areas of interest and people committed to “making a difference”
- People willing to take a risk – taking the first step forward
- A belief that even small actions can have long- term, positive consequences
- **Above all, we need to take action!**

Contact Information

Rev. Michelle Down
First-St. Andrew's United Church
revmichelledown@fsaunited.com
519-679-8182